



Three points we needed

By A Cultured Left Foot

In the cold light of day, weekends don't come much better than this. Second-placed Manchester City lost, Southampton dropped to sixth, trailing Arsenal by five points. Any gap that needs two matches as a minimum to catch up is, when you are in the lead, a good gap.

It was never going to be a vintage performance. Wednesday night hit the squad hard judging by the manager's words and this was a typical response. Yes, they won but in no small part that was due to Everton's lack of adventure beyond the first 20 minutes. Had they been intent on attacking they may have found more joy but they didn't and in that respect, they were the perfect guests.

Speaking afterwards, Wenger reflected the laboured play,

"On the fluency front we can do better but today our first worry was just to win the game."



Arsène Wenger

We knew that confidence would be at a premium and looking at coming weeks, a clean sheet and comfortable scoreline will begin to restore that belief. Win at QPR in midweek and the complexion of the remaining eight weeks of the season changes. It won't alter the inevitability of a Champions League exit in Monaco, the damage has already been done.

Arsène focussed on the positives, particularly his reshuffled back four,

"Our defensive concentration was at a much higher level than on Wednesday night. It was vital for us for the rest of the season to win the game today. I believe that we wanted too much to make the difference in the first game and forgot our basics - to defend as a unit. And today we came back to our basics."

It was tentative to begin with and Everton looked to exploit the new-look right side of the defence, with **Gabriel** and **Hector Bellerin** at times being too stretched in their positioning. **David Ospina** prevented Romelu Lukaku from breaking the deadlock as **Gabriel** hesitated but it was the Brazilian who would make the timeliest of interventions late in the first half. A perfect tackle with his 'wrong' foot to stop the Everton forward and begin a sequence of events which led to **Olivier Giroud** scoring the opening goal.



Olivier Giroud

That moment, when Giroud wheeled away having scored from the ensuing corner, lifted the players. The positive was that prior to the goal, even though he still off-target, he did not shy away from opportunities although how long before such profligacy turns negative largely depends on the flow of a match.

Starting with the Ox on the right was no doubt meant to shore up the midfield with the youngster's work-rate underlining the importance of Wenger's words during the week. His tendency to drift infield irks but overall, he had a positive contribution. It raises questions about **Theo Walcott**'s future with his apparent relegation to third-choice on the right flank. Perhaps he isn't as fit as he or the manager would like but it was a match that cried out for a stretching of someone's legs down the right flank.

Whilst the result will have pleased Wenger, it has come at some cost with some suggestion that **Francis Coquelin** may need minor surgery to repair his broken nose. With **Mathieu Flamini**, **Jack Wilshere** and **Aaron Ramsey** missing, it means **Calum Chambers** is most likely to start at Loftus Road. He can expect a sterner test from genuinely relegation-threatened QPR than flirting-with-danger-and-already-beaten Everton.



Calum Chambers

There is a danger in over-analysing this one match. We needed a response from the players and to a certain extent, got it. As familiar as the tentative, over-elaborate play was at times, the win was more important. This squad, perhaps as a reflection of the manager, takes defeat badly and invariably wobbles for a couple of games. Get through that spell without losing and a bounce returns to their stride.



Best of the Blogs

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A Cultured Left Foot

It's crucial that they carry on with a win on Wednesday. They have three Premier League games to find their feet once more before Liverpool visit The Emirates. That is the test Arsenal are building toward, more so than United or Monaco. The latter is a face-saving exercise where any victory will be spun as a 'what-if' moment followed by a wistful glance to the past, almost a validation of what might have been, forgetting the recurring nature of Wednesday's home defeat.

United is a tougher one to consider with much depending on how well the trip to West London goes. The tentative steps of recovery have been taken but they need to be followed by confident strides. If the squad is to improve year-on-year - and I'm not sure this season can be viewed in that light - they have to learn how to respond quickly to setbacks, to display the resilience Wenger was so fond of. I'm not sure it's evident at the moment and that mental toughness is something they need to develop quickly.



Tomas Rosicky

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